

## STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 97/2010

14 July 2010

The interview of Minister Jaime Netto on Monday on the case of the 14 year old girl who had spent two nights in prison instead of being looked after by the Care Agency, has raised more questions than it answered. In addition, it is quite incredible, although entirely consistent with the way that the GSD conducts politics, that the Government did not take the opportunity to give a public apology for these turn of events, which most people rightly describe as shocking.

This is the second time in barely a month that the provision of social services through the Care Agency has been found by the general public to be wanting. The first was the case of an 83 year old man with dementia or senility who went to prison as GHA management argued that his condition did not entitle him to a hospital bed and the Government, through the Care Agency, refused to help. The second case is that of this 14 year old girl who spent two nights in prison because Minister Netto claimed that the Agency simply did not have the resources to deal with this “rare” case.

Further, these events have done nothing to dispel the notion that the GSD Government are only focused on grandiose luxury schemes and other projects of a questionable nature instead of concentrating on the needs of vulnerable people. It is very telling that the Minister failed to address the real issue, which is to explain why the Care Agency for which he has ultimate political responsibility did not have enough resources to deal with this matter. Further still, Mr Netto took the unusual step of putting personal details of this case into the public domain, which is not only highly unusual, but which the GSD always deploys as an excuse when it does not wish to answer questions in Parliament. The Opposition consider that the Minister should have confined himself to the political implications and the consequences of the policies of his Government.

The Minister also put forward the extraordinary proposition that the Care Agency only deal with “*normal*” cases. Mr Netto should be aware that the provision of social services and child care exists precisely to deal with cases that cannot be described as “*run of the mill situations*”. The point is that if the Agency only dealt with “*normal*” cases (whatever that means) there would be no need for the Agency in the first place.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister for social services Neil Costa said:

“It is obvious that the Government have tried to justify the unjustifiable through a string of feeble excuses and circular arguments. The plain and inescapable truth is that the GSD cannot hide from what has happened. The Minister, for instance, made the absurd distinction between a minor who has left home and one that has been abandoned, as if this spurious distinction in any way exonerated his Government from responsibility in this case. The plain fact is that a 14 year old minor needed the assistance of the Government and ended up in prison. The Opposition strongly feels that we must be there for those who, for whatever reason, need the help of Government. The GSD must surely realise that whereas many Gibraltarians thankfully have either extended families or financial resources or both to rely upon in such circumstances, there will always be some, however few, that will require the assistance of the state in providing them shelter and other assistance when everything else fails. The actions of the GSD Government are shocking. Therefore, the Opposition entirely rejects Minister Netto’s view that there was a safety net for this minor – if there had been, why did she have to spend even one night in prison?”